

# **(al)ONE: Thriving A Stroke - Stacie Broek**

Stacie Broek wrote her book (al)ONE Thriving A Stroke in spite of her inability to remember what she has just read in a book a few lines ago while rehabilitating the aphasia she inherited as a result of a stroke.

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Stacie Broek 0:00

I finished my book last summer. So it took me about two and a half years. It is about the first year of recovery, but it's not about my recovery. It's about the transformation as we were talking about before. That's happened in this first year of recovery.

Stacie Broek 0:18

It's meant to tell people everything that you're feeling is okay, that I see you that

we all see you and don't let the demons get to you because it's okay to feel this way. It's okay to you know, have your sister hang up on you. It's okay to throw all your toys out of the pram and yeah, but it's better the next day or not. You have to get back up and try it again.

Intro 0:50

This is the recovery after stroke podcast. With Bill Gasiamis helping you navigate recovery after stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03

Hello again and welcome to episode 220 of the recovery after stroke podcast. If you're a stroke survivor with a story to share about your experience, come and join me on the show. The interviews are not scripted, you do not have to plan for them.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16

All you need to do to qualify is to be a stroke survivor, care for someone who is a stroke survivor, or be one of the fabulous people that help stroke survivors overcome their condition. Go to [recoveryafterstroke.com/contact](https://recoveryafterstroke.com/contact), fill out the contact form, and as soon as I receive your request I will respond with more details on how you can choose a time that works for you and me to meet over zoom.

## **Introduction - (al)ONE Thriving A Stroke**

Bill Gasiamis 1:40

Now my guest today is Stacie Broek who was living as an expat in Japan when at 46 she experienced a carotid artery dissection that left her with aphasia, the inability to walk, talk, read or write but that didn't stop her from writing her first book (al)ONE Thriving A Stroke, which is available in Paperback, Kindle, and audiobook. Stacie Trousers. I mean, Stacie Broek, welcome to the podcast.

Stacie Broek 2:07

Thank you. Nice to be here.

Bill Gasiamis 2:09

Nice to have you here. So for the people that don't know, why did I call you Trousers?

Stacie Broek 2:15

Yes, because my surname is Broek which is in Dutch trousers. So you could call me Stacie Trousers, Stacie Broek, Stacie Pantaloon, whatever.

Bill Gasiamis 2:28

Yeah, I love it. So thanks for being on the podcast. Tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

Stacie Broek 2:34

Yeah, so I'm originally a Pennsylvania Country Girl. Although I haven't lived in Pennsylvania for a few years, basically over 20 years. So my stroke happened in the center of Tokyo, where I was living with my family as an expat. I was playing tennis, two to three times a week, I didn't have any real concerns about my health.

Stacie Broek 2:56

I was young, I was active I ate well, and then all of a sudden, my stroke happened on a Wednesday. And on the Monday, I was playing tennis, and I started to see these little spots where that ball should be. So I was reaching up to hit a smash, and all of a sudden, it went fuzzy and then white.

## **The Initial Signs of Stroke**

Stacie Broek 3:16

And so I didn't think anything of it. I thought maybe I just didn't eat enough food for breakfast. And then on Tuesday, the same thing was playing tennis. And you know, I was seeing these little white spots where the ball should be. So then this debilitating fatigue came over me and I just wanted to take a nap.

Stacie Broek 3:57

So I took a nap on the couch. Waiting for my children to come home. And Tuesday night I drove them to the family club because I just win the car so I could have had that happened then. Luckily it did not. Yeah. Then Wednesday morning, I was getting ready to go to a PTA meeting, Parents Teacher Association meeting. And it was a really big meeting for us.

Stacie Broek 4:28

So we were presenting doesn't matter what we're presenting, but yeah, so then I woke up with a dead leg on my right-hand side. And I was like, what is this and

what do I do? And I thought maybe I just slept wrong, I didn't really know. So I just carried on with my normal routine.

Stacie Broek 4:28

And then all of a sudden this fatigue is the only way it was very debilitating. It was overtaking my entire being that I just needed to lay down. So I asked my husband to take my youngest to the bus. So I could just pause for a moment before I went to the PTA meeting. I never made it to that meeting, I sat down on my bed to just, you know, collect my thoughts.

Stacie Broek 5:21

And then I thought to myself, you know, I'm going to text Katya, my friend was meeting beforehand, just that it would be a little bit late, because I couldn't meet her for coffee before the meeting. And then I was looking at this thing in my hand, and what was it and what was I trying to do with my cell phone?

Stacie Broek 5:44

And I just threw it away. I just threw it down, and I went to sleep. And that's where my husband found me. He luckily, was working from home that day, in the morning. And he also gladly knew the signs of stroke. So he was looking at me, and I knew that he was there. And I knew that you wanted me to respond to him, he was saying, Stacie, Stacie, can you say something?

Stacie Broek 6:14

What's the password for your mobile phone? And because in his stress, he was trying to call the ambulance from my mobile phone, not knowing my password, and the rest. And I knew that he was there. And he sounded like he wanted me to do something. But was in Fairyland.

## **Stacie Broek Had A Carotid Artery Dissection**

Bill Gasiamis 6:35

So you had a carotid artery dissection?

Stacie Broek 6:38

Yes, yes, I did.

Bill Gasiamis 6:40

And was there any signs now thinking back, was there any signs perhaps, that

maybe this thing was revealing itself earlier than that first time when you were playing tennis, and you were seeing what the spots in the sky?

Stacie Broek 6:59

I had some signs, but they were not on the left side of my body. So I had a muscle ache here. So had I been more pitbullish to get that figured out? Maybe I would have had an MRI and maybe they could have seen my dissection happening.

Stacie Broek 7:21

But everyone, well, my doctors here now back in Zurich. My doctors here say that if I had ever Carotid Artery Dissection again, I will feel it. So you don't have to be afraid you can do everything. Not everything. But I can't play tennis. But they say to me that if you have a Carotid Artery Dissection, you can normally feel this. I couldn't feel it. So up until the two days before, there were no warning signs.

Bill Gasiamis 8:02

Just a strange ache on the other side of your body.

Stacie Broek 8:07

Yeah. So I'm normally an active person. I have three children as well and we were living in the center of Tokyo, so it could have been my exhaustion was on my carotid artery dissection. Or maybe it was just normal things.

Bill Gasiamis 8:26

Yeah, that fatigue that you described is going to be very familiar with the stroke survivors listening because I know about that fatigue. And everyone who's had a stroke, knows about that fatigue, it's seriously all consuming and there is no way of fighting through it, or pushing through it or making your brain work better, there's just no way, the only way to do anything, is to rest a lot and to try and get some energy back in the batteries. So you can go again, but then they don't last very long. And then you're back in the same situation.

Stacie Broek 9:04

Yeah, absolutely. It's an inertia that just takes over your being. Yeah, absolutely. There's no reason to fight it.

Bill Gasiamis 9:14

Yeah. So you ended up in hospital? And then how long did you spend there? And what did they do to help you out?

Stacie Broek 9:21

Yeah, so I spent six weeks in a Japanese hospital. And they were brilliant because the Japanese really they're so meticulous about everything and that really helped me to understand all of the language and the customs were definitely a barrier.

Stacie Broek 9:47

I find that I was lucky in my unluckiness, but I was only the 11th person in Japan to have this operation that I had to have, because my carotid artery is redundant, which means it's curly or torturous. So they were trying to place a balloon in my carotid artery.

Stacie Broek 10:14

But because of the redundancy, think I can say that redundancy. They had to go to plan B, which was an experimental approach, because I was only the number 11 person to have this operation in Japan. All that to say that they didn't see me coming, right.

Stacie Broek 10:34

So I was younger than most stroke patients, especially in Japan, because they're an aging population. And I was foreign. And even though I still suffer, but I was suffering immensely from aphasia. And the only word I could say was 111, when I had those six weeks in the hospital, or the beginning of the six weeks, I also was making myself and my wants and needs very vocal for them, even though I couldn't speak.

Stacie Broek 11:10

So they didn't really know what to do with me. But they wanted me to go to stroke rehabilitation center, after my six week hospital stay. Even through my fog, I knew that that wasn't for me. And I didn't know what was for me at that time. I just wanted, you know, this was the first time.

Stacie Broek 11:37

So I started with speech therapy directly after my stroke, even before the second week of my stroke. Because in Japan, of course, speech therapy is done in Japanese. So I had to find it a practitioner who could take me and who had a time, and I'm still with Seth, my speech therapist, to even today.

Stacie Broek 12:04

Three and a half years beyond my stroke. Yeah, so the physiotherapy, I couldn't

walk I couldn't, I couldn't reuse the right side of my body. So they were very gentle and, and giving me the help that I needed. Thought they wanted me to go to a stroke rehab facility. And upon touring two of the leading rehab facilities in Japan. I knew it wasn't for me.

Bill Gasiamis 12:39

It would be a little bit more difficult to have a stroke in a country where the language is foreign. And the barriers of language and customs and all that stuff are just so immense, because you need familiarity at that time to help make you feel comfortable in what they're saying and understand what they're saying and safe in some weird way. Just because you're in a familiar environment, or you can have guests and friends come to see you. You were so far away from home, were you able to have anyone other than your husband there to see you to support you?

Stacie Broek 13:28

Yeah, so we were only in Japan for a year and a half before my stroke. But Japan was an amazing place to have my stroke in that way because all the expat community came together. And they lifted me up, they were my village, they were my sparkly people. They cooked for my six weeks that I was in the hospital they all brought so it was like a revolving door in our home with all the food that was brought everynight someone would make my husband and my kids food.

Stacie Broek 14:08

And that carried on, my stroke happened in February. That's happened until the summer. So I was able to because I recovered it from home eventually. Yeah, so my friends and everyone just pitched in like they were my family. My mother came immediately to take care of the children to take care of me to take care of my husband.

Stacie Broek 14:40

But she could only stay I think for two weeks or something like this. So my girlfriend that I mentioned before Katya, she stepped in and her family stepped in. So that was much now I feel like Katya is much more than a sister. She's much more than a friend.

Stacie Broek 15:03

She's my girl, she's my woman, she's my go to. And I think that's what the amazing or the lucky thing was about having it in Japan. Okay, we couldn't be

next to our family. But even if I had my stroke in Zurich, where is my home base? Now, I wouldn't be next to my family. So that was really a lucky thing to have it there.

Bill Gasiamis 15:29

Yeah. Wow. That would have been much more relieving than being completely alone in that country, even though if it's just your husband, because then you had someone help to deal with the kids and all that stuff. So it's great to hear that the expat community came together and rallied around you guys and supported you guys that's fabulous. Absolutely. Fabulous. So how long did you spend in hospital overall?

Stacie Broek 15:59

Six weeks, and then because of my stroke's severity level, and because I still needed 24-hour care. After the six weeks we had a nurse come. She didn't live with us, but she was there seven days a week. When my husband couldn't be there, for sure. And you had to make sure that we still felt this level of safety because it was scary to go home, as you can imagine.

## **The Procedure Stacie Broek Had**

Bill Gasiamis 16:28

Yeah, absolutely. So how did they get to that artery? Did they have to operate through your skull through the back of your neck? How did they actually get in there?

Stacie Broek 16:41

They went into my eye I guess. And it's like, when you have an angiogram they stick it up through that.

Bill Gasiamis 17:01

The thing that wiggles up and goes past your heart and goes all the way up into the neck. And they addressed it from there. Okay, so I've had an angiogram. And they went straight into the brain. And that was intense experience to feel some of that and what was going on. But although it's definitely invasive, it's rather minimally invasive compared to opening up the back of your neck or your head. And then I imagine the recovery in at least in that stage is a bit quicker. Now, I see you shrugging and you can't imagine people have brain surgery or anything



like that.

Stacie Broek 17:48

No, I really can't.

Bill Gasiamis 17:49

Yeah, so you don't do scars, you can't do blood and all that kind of stuff. You're not that kind of person?

Stacie Broek 17:55

Well, no, I'm not. But my son recently had bad break playing football. And I had to clean his wounds and he had an open cast and I did it because yeah, that's what you do when you love someone. Yeah, you're a mom so I don't like it but I can.

Bill Gasiamis 18:17

I hear you. Well, it sounds like a couple of things went your way. You didn't have to have anyone do anything to your hair or your head specifically, you had your family around. So a few Silver Linings there in your seriously difficult, unfortunate. I'm not sure what how you would describe the experience.

Bill Gasiamis 18:42

But for me, it was traumatic. For me it was challenging because I had to question my mortality and all that kind of stuff. Was there any of that stuff running through your head? Did you ever go there? What was it like for you to be supposedly fit in well, and then experience this life-challenging moment?

Stacie Broek 19:10

Yeah, so in the beginning, I had this, you know, I always thought that I would die some accident or something gone wrong, or, you know, skydiving, I would never skydive. But, you know, something beyond my control. You know, that's what I thought. And now I had a Carotid Artery Dissection, which caused a stroke, which was near fatal, and I should have died.

Stacie Broek 19:41

And so then you had all these questions right? You, don't know. And so the first few months were hard that way because of this insecurity that I felt and then the first year was a little bit painful. But I worked through this with my speech therapist Seth was really instrumental in because also when Japan you don't have any, counselors or case managers so he was like everything to me, because he

also suffered a brain injury in his 20s.

Stacie Broek 20:32

He's my age, so we had this camaraderie. So it was really special. So every time I was particularly afraid, or anytime I was panicking, then we would just write down the worst thing that would happen if the worst thing, the worst thing of the worst thing happened. What was that? So I can remember.

Stacie Broek 20:57

To give you an example. About three months from my hospital stay, I went back to the doctor for regular scheduled MRI. And my neurosurgeon told me that they would have to perform another angiogram to figure out what's happening because it wasn't quite clear.

Stacie Broek 21:22

And for me, this felt like a death sentence. Right? So I was really and now it's like, okay, you can, you can survive it right. But at this time, it felt like the world was going to collapse, because last time I went for an angiogram, this happened, right.

Stacie Broek 21:37

So yeah, so Seth said to me, Well, what is the worst thing that can happen? I wasn't afraid of dying, once you survive something like this, then you can understand death a little bit better, right? So I wasn't really afraid of dying. But I was really afraid to have it happen in front of my children.

Stacie Broek 22:09

And to make them experience this. So that was what I was ultimately scared of. So we put measures into place to make sure that yeah, not to make sure because you'd never be sure. But yeah, that wouldn't happen so easily.

Bill Gasiamis 22:34

Yeah. To minimize the possibility.

Stacie Broek 22:38

Yeah.

# Regaining Control

Bill Gasiamis 22:42

Did that give you a little bit of control back? Did you feel like at least you were controlling the process going forward?

Stacie Broek 22:49

Absolutely. And that's what I tried to do. I just tried to, even today, I've tried to see the silver lining. It's not always possible. Sometimes you wake up and you're just you should just go back to bed, for sure. But I really try to see all the Silver Linings because I'm alive. And let's celebrate it, you know?

Bill Gasiamis 23:13

Yeah that's a good start. Oh, absolutely I know how you feel. So your husband, how is he doing? He had to experience and witness all of this. And he would have felt completely helpless. Because he's not in control of A. what's happening to you, and even though he would definitely want to help you and he's trying to help you. He can't make you better. He can only do those peripheral things. How is he? How did he experience this? What has he told you about his version of the experience?

Stacie Broek 23:55

Yeah, so my husband is a very gracious dutch guy. I mean, he loves life and loves living it and this experience A. has made him more well, not cautious it's brought his loving life not down a little bit, but he's more aware of how perilous our precious life is.

Stacie Broek 24:28

We were in Japan for his job. So he was able to get on with his work in a shadow perspective. But I think it says something to him. So my surgery was 10 and a half hours long. And at a certain point when they were trying to place a balloon into the carotid artery, they came to him, and they said, look, it's not working.

Stacie Broek 25:02

Can we have your permission to try an experimental approach? And they explained what they were going to do to me. And I can't imagine what this did to him because he's a happy-go-lucky guy. I mean he's just that way. And he said, a very important question.

Stacie Broek 25:30

He said, would you do this? If it were your wife? And Dr. Ichisan said, Yes and I would also do it if it were my daughter. And then he was permitted to enter the surgery to see me, hopefully not the last time but could be. I don't know what that did to him, or does to him.

Stacie Broek 25:57

If you would have bumped into him on the streets the weeks after my stroke, he wouldn't even be able to say, stroke you he would have to say, she's in the hospital for... He couldn't get it out, he was in mental block for him. So but, you know, little by little, because he also was my primary caregiver.

Stacie Broek 26:23

So it does something to anyone. Also to Johan. I think also, going through this life-changing experience, shines a bright spotlight down on every one of your flaws, both as an individual and as couples, of course. And I wasn't easy. The first year, I'm not easy anyway. So he's been through a lot.

Bill Gasiamis 27:00

Congratulations for admitting that you're not easy. While we're admitting things, so I'd like to also admit that I'm not easy. But I'm bloody doing my best to get better all the time. And I don't know if I'm succeeding or not. It's like happiness being better. You don't become it, you're always striving to be it.

Bill Gasiamis 27:27

And you try and live it. And you just head that way. So I was motivated to be better after the stroke, of course, because I wanted to turn up better at my house at my family events, everywhere I wanted to turn up at work. And that's because I thought I might not make it to 40 because my stroke was at 37.

Bill Gasiamis 27:55

So I had to mend a lot, I did a real big, deep internal search for answers or clues as to what I might be doing wrong or where I might improve. And that's what I worked on, so that I could at least gain some type of improvement and then show the kids and my wife and whoever, that there was this change.

Bill Gasiamis 28:25

This shift in me that I had intended to get better and I had these intentions, right? This ability to prove that you're hard or difficult in you know, this personal way

like humans are and can be. Is that something that you were aware of before the stroke? Was that a new awakening that you've had?

Stacie Broek 28:54

Absolutely. I was always the person that said, Oh, the card's in the mail or, you know, scoffed at waitresses, or you know, I didn't see that thought of me. I was a career girl, I was going for it. And I just thought that was how you lived your life. So I fully agree with you.

## **Thriving A Stroke**

Stacie Broek 29:24

I can I'm nodding my head in connection with you because after my stroke it was in December, I had a conversation with my sister from Pennsylvania, and it didn't go well. It ended up with her slamming down the phone and cutting off all ties with me.

Stacie Broek 29:48

And that's what's the final straw let's say I went deep inside myself like you I was collecting everything that I could I went into a shell. I think the bright side of my stroke was that that moment, I realized that I'm hurting people. People that I love people that I don't know, you know, everyone, so I did a lot of work on myself.

Stacie Broek 30:31

And yeah, some days I do it well, I get up, I write in my journal. I do my mantras, you know? And everything's bright, shiny survivor. But some days, I do it crappy, lousy, crappy job of it. But it's a work in progress, like you said, and yeah, I have some models, if you can say that, of how I want to live my life. And I just strive every day for that.

Intro 31:08

If you've had a stroke, and you're in recovery, you'll know what a scary and confusing time it can be, you're likely to have a lot of questions going through your mind. Like, how long will it take to recover? Will I actually recover? What things should I avoid in case I make matters worse?

Intro 31:25

Doctors will explain things that obviously, you've never had a stroke before, you probably don't know what questions to ask. If this is you, you may be missing out

on doing things that could help speed up your recovery. If you're finding yourself in that situation, stop worrying, and head to [recoveryafterstroke.com](http://recoveryafterstroke.com) where you can download a guide that will help you it's called the seven questions to ask your doctor about your stroke.

Intro 31:52

These seven questions are the ones Bill wished he'd asked when he was recovering from a stroke, they'll not only help you better understand your condition. And they'll help you take a more active role in your recovery. Head to the website. Now, [recoveryafterstroke.com](http://recoveryafterstroke.com) and download the guide. It's free.

Bill Gasiamis 32:11

Yeah, that's a good thing to strive for. I just want to try and see if I can understand what was it specifically that shifted for you? Yes, it was the event of the stroke, and all the things that came with that. But was there something that you gained? Was there an insight or some knowledge that you gained that allowed you to see the fact that you were this person that you now noticed wasn't the nicest all the time or was short with waitresses? Is this something that made you see that because of the stroke? Was it because of the stroke that something occurred and made you aware of that?

Stacie Broek 32:55

I think it was a series of events, I think, my friends, the expat community also chipping in it was showing me this kindness. My best friend from New York, flew over. My mother flying over. That was a series of events. And then probably culminating, I can remember actually my best friend from New York.

Stacie Broek 33:23

She came just before the summer. And I was really stressing because A. she was coming. That was a major stress for me. And then I had just a week before we were going to fly for the first time back to Switzerland. So I was very stressed. And I know that you guys know this, but because it's a stress that you just can't do anything about right?

Stacie Broek 33:54

How do I pack my bags? How does this process work? But Cara bless her she asked me this question, what are you stressed about? You seem really stressed. I said, I don't know how to pack my bag, I don't know how to pack the bags of the

children.

Stacie Broek 34:13

She's sat one night and packed everyone to go to Zurich. So I think that act of kindness that you just have to ask and someone would help me. I mean, oh my God. So yeah, so I think there was a series of kindnesses, and then culminating with my sister, just hanging up the phone, calling me a bitch and a bully and saying, I don't want anything to do with you, or your family. I'm done. You know, and that's probably the catalyst. I think it was a series of events ending.

Bill Gasiamis 34:49

Did you also because now I'm going to describe me tell me if you relate to this. Did you also notice yourself as being the person that if that happened to somebody else, the stroke thing, you may not have been as forthcoming and as supportive as other people had been to you. Is that what you realized? Because I realized that about me.

Stacie Broek 35:15

Yeah, I mean, it's funny because I'm exactly the opposite. I'm a good friend if you need me. But if you don't need me, I might not call you for months or years. I'm that kind of friend. So I'm a friend in need. But that every day.

Bill Gasiamis 35:39

Small stuff?

Stacie Broek 35:40

Yeah it was lost on me. So I'm trying to be better that way. Because if you need me, I'll come everywhere for you. But if you don't need me, meh.

Bill Gasiamis 35:55

Interesting. I think the people who don't express that they need you, need you more. That's what I've found. I've got some friends who I really need. And because I really need them, I give them the space. So I don't become overbearing on them. And I let them come to me, from time to time, I let them know that I'm here.

Bill Gasiamis 36:22

I don't judge them because they're busy, etc. And perhaps they haven't been through a moment like we've been through and their awareness of the situation is

different. We're both very close to each other. And we really, truly respect and appreciate each other.

Bill Gasiamis 36:38

But I describe him as being elusive, elusive to be able to pin down in one location. So we can do things. And his partner will say to me, let's organize the catch up. And I'll say I've been trying to for months, but he's elusive. I can't pin him down. He makes it sound like he's always doing something and busy.

Bill Gasiamis 37:02

She says we hardly ever do anything. And I realized that it's just the way he's processed. And I don't know what that is. And I don't know what's stopping him. So I don't know how to approach it any other way. But I'm giving him space, right? However, that's how he was before the stroke. That's how he always was, so it's not new.

Bill Gasiamis 37:27

But what was different is when I had the stroke, he was there. Out of nowhere, he was there all the time. When I needed him. He picked me up, he decided to create his own swimming rehabilitation for me. And he took me to the local swimming pool once a week for about 10 weeks or something.

Bill Gasiamis 37:49

And we had a hot sauna, we had a swimming session, we had all these sessions. And he's not a rehabilitation person. He's an Excel, Spreadsheet kind of guy. So it was kind of like, who is this person? Where are you coming from? And of course, I'm so totally appreciative of that, that now, I want to be around him, you know, and I want to have him near me.

Bill Gasiamis 38:19

But I don't want to choke him with my love and affection. So I give it to him in short doses. Because also he finds it difficult to accept praise. When I say that you're responsible for a lot of my recovery. He finds it difficult to deal with that I don't know why.

Bill Gasiamis 38:47

But it's strange, right? So they're the kinds of things that happened to me that made me think about, would I have done the same thing for him? Because I think, even though he was unwell, I would have judged him that he was elusive.



Bill Gasiamis 39:04

And I think I might have been standoffish and just let him do his own thing. Instead of rally around him to the extent that perhaps, you know, hopefully, he never does, but may have needed me. So I also started to relate to people, when I had to spend time in a wheelchair that really opened my eyes to the people who were previously invisible to me.

Bill Gasiamis 39:35

The people who I thought were just sitting down because that's how naive I was. I thought, well, they're just sitting down. I mean, it can't be that bad. I mean, my God, you know, what a stupid conclusion to reach. But that's how naive and how unaware of other people's struggles and challenges I was I spent about a month in a wheelchair.

Bill Gasiamis 40:04

And I struggled to do everything for a month. And then I was lucky that I didn't need to remain in a wheelchair. But that whole month, I was thinking of every other person that I've come across, that was in one that I neglected to be empathic towards, they're big life-changing moments, aren't they?

Stacie Broek 40:37

Absolutely, absolutely. It's the same thing for language. Because when I was living in New York, I didn't understand why people would move to a country and not speak the language. I didn't understand it at all. Now, I'm living in Switzerland. Can I speak the language? Japan, you know, so it's also this. You see other people's struggles you see their side? Yeah, it's very eye-opening.

Bill Gasiamis 41:15

In amongst all of that, so you're recovering from aphasia. You're in speech therapy. And somehow you're doing a blog. Now, is putting words on the screen or on paper easier for you, then speaking them? Or is there some difficulty with that as well?

## **Stacie Broek Suffered From Agraphia**

Stacie Broek 41:33

Yeah, so I also suffered from agraphia, but I'm a writer, oh I wasn't a writer, and I still am a writer. So writing is my passion. This is what gets me out of bed in the

morning, so to lose that. And the doctors secretly told my husband, that I should look for a new profession, because I'm definitely not going to be a writer again in the hospital in Japan.

Stacie Broek 42:04

So I'm really lucky that he didn't tell me that until after my first book was the second draft of my first book was done. So I'm really happy. So I suffered with a graduate too, so that my speech therapist, I can also remember the day that we were on, it was the interview with that. And it was virtual, and I was with my husband.

Stacie Broek 42:36

And talking to each other. My husband told that I was a writer, and I was so mad at him. I'm like, you can't say this and I couldn't say it. But I was like, you don't and my body language was all erratic. And I was very mad at him because I couldn't even speak. So how can I write anything?

Stacie Broek 43:03

But Seth bless him. We spend two hours a day, each day, seven days a week on my writing. So maybe one word, one, maybe one sentence, an hour would come out of me. And then little by little bit by bit, paragraph by paragraph, you know, I started to write now I still can't read.

Stacie Broek 43:31

I can, but by the time I get to the end of the sentence, yeah, it's a little bit blurry. What happened in the beginning of the sentence, although I just published my first book. So that's funny, right? But Seth will read it back to me.

Bill Gasiamis 43:51

That's fascinating that you have struggle, remembering what you've just read, but you can write a book, and you can finish a sentence or a paragraph. And they also had the Aphasia aspect of it. So somehow in there still the fire for writing a books burning, and it's still enabling you to somehow navigate all of these complex things that you took for granted previously as being easy.

Bill Gasiamis 44:24

And it must have been one of the hardest things to do is write a book as far as when you did you compare? Were you Did you ever do oh my god, I'm terrible. Why am I doing this? Because I used to be so good at it. Did you ever compare

yourself and make yourself feel bad about the fact that writing now had become more challenging than it used to be?

Stacie Broek 44:49

No, I look at it different way. I thought to myself, thank God for my stroke because that was my input. Just to actually write my book, you know, A. it gave me the subject matter. But I don't know if I would have written my book if I didn't separate my stroke. I think it was my catalyst, it was my impetus to actually do it and get down and say, Hey, I'm going to do this. And if I didn't suffer my stroke, or survived my stroke, I probably would still be hemming and hawing about what subject matters to write about you know, so it's funny.

Bill Gasiamis 45:35

I like that, because I can relate to that, because it's exactly the same thing. I set it on a couple of podcasts ago, I think on the last episode, or the one before I said, to the person I was chatting to, that, I always felt that I had a reason, something to say. But I never said much, because I didn't have an expertise that I could embrace and speak about as an expert in my own right.

Bill Gasiamis 46:03

And that I therefore couldn't relate to other people. And therefore, my speaking for the sake of speaking, like a lot of people do these days, wasn't really going to be joyful for me. But it also wasn't going to reach the right people. It wasn't going to impact people. And wasn't going to make the it wasn't going to be purposeful. So why do it? Why what's the point?

Bill Gasiamis 46:28

And the stroke made it possible for me to find that group of people, your group, is my grip and the grip that other people belong to who have had a stroke of him previously on this podcast, you listen to this, and now on my voice, is lending has a purpose towards bringing us together, helping us understand helping us relate helping us not feel alone.

Bill Gasiamis 47:01

And, and then also really important, which I didn't realize was going to be really important was helping other people like you get their story out and share their story, even if it's not a book, even if it's not a podcast, even if it's just, they're never going to do whatever again, but they came on and for what and once they

expressed it to other people who completely understand them.

Stacie Broek 47:25

Yeah, absolutely. I can only fully agree with you.

Bill Gasiamis 47:32

And the book wasn't ready to come out until you had to have this life experience and, and even though you live the life of a mom of a super productive person, our wife, our sister, all these things, even though you did all of that, you perhaps were lacking life, meaningful life experience, and therefore the words that you're going to put down, didn't feel like they were genuine or something.

Stacie Broek 48:03

Absolutely, I found my calling somehow I found what I was, okay, I was meant to be a wife. I was meant to be a mother or whatever. But more than that, for me, I found what my purpose is, you know, I really am passionate about my writing, but also making sure that other stroke survivors can get up the courage every day to fight.

Stacie Broek 48:35

Because someone needs to hear that right. And that's my passion is to make sure that we don't lose any, you know, the doctors, the neurosurgeons are fantastic at saving our lives. But what happens afterwards, right?

Bill Gasiamis 48:54

Yeah. Love it. So do you happen to have a copy of the book there that you can hold up to the camera? The book is called *Alone Thriving a Stroke*, and it's available on Kindle and on Amazon, all that stuff, and audiobook on Audible. awesome.

Bill Gasiamis 49:30

In Australia, if I bought it, it's going to cost me like 20 bucks, which is really good value. And a little bit of the blurb goes like this. It says the frank unapologetic memoir about a woman's struggle to start again after a, devastating stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 49:51

Stacie was living the expat dream for their children in central Tokyo private school, house and travel back home all paid for until the morning when her carotid artery spontaneously ripped, causing blood to pull in her artery wall. Upon

waking from a 10 hour surgery, Stacie couldn't walk, talk or fight herself. Yeah, pretty dramatic. And now you're walking, talking. And I imagine your husband's not feeding you anymore?

Stacie Broek 50:24

I can't use chopsticks, anyway. But I can feed myself.

Bill Gasiamis 50:31

What was the hardest thing that you had to go through personally during the crisis? And perhaps even after that, what was the hardest thing that you had to overcome?

Stacie Broek 50:53

You know, I was very, very determined. I didn't like being in a wheelchair. So I would grab anything my IV Stand, my mother, the hospital, the things you have in a wall to help people like me.

Bill Gasiamis 51:15

Handlebars.

Stacie Broek 51:16

Yeah, that one. And I was so motivated, I would walk to the bathroom when no one was watching. So I was super motivated. The hardest thing? Some things I did without now looking back, like I showered alone in the hospital. I mean, that's for me. Now, looking back. I'm scared about this. I actually would do this by myself. So I think, the scariest. I don't know, the scariest thing. I don't know, that's a good question.

## **The Hardest Thing For Stacie Broek**

Bill Gasiamis 51:54

The hardest thing so it's not something that stands out that was so hard for you that you had to fight to overcome. That was hard for you to experience or to deal with, or did you just take it sounds like you took it all in your stride? Which is fine. The answer doesn't have to be that there was something.

Stacie Broek 52:12

I think the thing that in terms of what I don't, what I can't do that I did before, I've genuinely just forgot it, because I'm not working on it. So I can't do simple

math. Like someone asked me. How long did you live in Switzerland before you moved to Tokyo?

Stacie Broek 52:38

And I knew that we arrived in Switzerland at 2004. And I knew we'd left in 2017. But I couldn't. And I still can't do the math. So. But it's not important to me to work on this. So I really left all these things behind. I think now I know, now that I'm talking about it. The hardest part for me still today is like, last night, we went out to celebrate my birthday it's not my birthday, but it was a late celebration of my birthday.

Stacie Broek 53:14

And all the chatter from everyone. If I know what to say it doesn't come out. And that is a feeling of connection that's lost. And we're human beings we're meant to connect. So I think that is the hardest part for me, although I don't look at it oh, poor me. I mean, I have a very positive attitude about it, because it'll come back in some way.

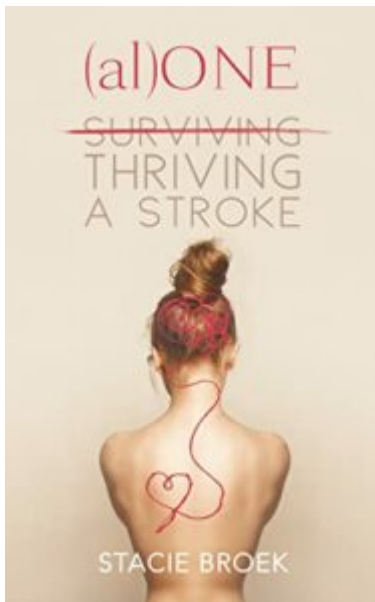
Stacie Broek 53:44

If I work on it, which I am working on it, but that for me, is the hardest. Yeah. Thanks for asking. Now I yeah, that's for me is the hardest part. Like, even being at dinner with my family, if I want to say something, and they're brilliant. They've been rock stars through the whole thing. But they will sit and wait for me. And then it won't come out. It will come out.

Stacie Broek 54:09

And they they're amazing. And sometimes if I look at them, they know, okay, I can fill in the blanks, or if I don't look at them, you know, they know. But it's hard. And people don't know how to react to that either. Right? So yeah, so it's this feeling of connection. I still connected because everyone is then I have very few skeptics. If I do have some skeptics that I run into, yeah, whatever. We all have them. I find myself very lucky. But keeping up with the conversation or interjecting and adding to the conversation sometimes listening is better.

## **Writing The Book (al)ONE: Thriving A Stroke**



Bill Gasiamis 54:56

So you've become a really good listener as a result. That sounds like you love to get involved with the conversation and let people know what you think. They appreciate that. They understand. I meant to ask you. Before I went on to this part, I meant to ask you actually about the book and what is it about? Tell me how it came to be? And how long did it take to write?

Stacie Broek 55:26

So, I finished my book last summer. So it took me about two and a half years. And it is about the first year of recovery. So it's detailed out week one, week two. But it's not about my recovery. It's about the transformation, as we were talking about before, that's happened in this first year of recovery.

Stacie Broek 55:57

It's meant to tell people, everything that you're feeling is okay, that I see you that we all see you and don't let the demons get to you. Because it's okay to feel this way. It's okay to you know, have your sister hang up on you. It's okay to throw all your toys out of the pram and yeah, but it's better the next day or not, you have to get back up and try it again.

Stacie Broek 56:31

When I first went to one of my scheduled MRI appointments back in the hospital in Japan, I asked my doctor, how long would it take to get back to normal? And the answer was wishy-washy and whatever. And then I realized that normal is not a thing.

Stacie Broek 56:49

You know? So I'm not, I'm not looking to recover 100% I'm looking to transform into Stacie 2.0 and see where that leads me. And yeah, I was very sad to not get everything back. I thought to myself, yeah, I want to do this, I want to do that. But actually, no, I just want to experience it and to enjoy the transformation. So that's what my book is about long story short, this transformation that I've experienced.

Bill Gasiamis 57:27

That's lovely. Because if you go back to normal, what was before, you're going to be that person who didn't really pay attention to other people who was rude or abrupt or whatever you were that you didn't realize was a negative trait of yours, that you excused because you made it the other person being wrong or the problem. And that's not a nice place to go back to this is a better place.

Bill Gasiamis 57:57

You went through all this stuff. You're at a better place. Everything about it is better. And I'm speaking to you, but I'm hoping that people listening and watching hear me speak to them. And they are getting that story. And going back to "before" or going back to "normal". That's a path to a less evolved version of you even though you feel injured that place before that was a lesser evolved version of you, and you've grown, even though you feel injured from the thing that happened in your head.

Stacie Broek 58:43

Absolutely. I think, you know, we all are not the same person that we were before our strokes, we've all evolved. Even my husband, for instance, he has evolved. We all are evolving. So why would you want to go back to where you were three years ago or five years ago?

Stacie Broek 59:06

So I think that's how I look at it. That we are all evolving every day, every month, every year. So when you say back to normal, what is normal then? Right? So, you know, normal is A it doesn't exist, but B you know, if you strive to be normal, I think it's a losing battle, right?

Bill Gasiamis 59:38

Yeah. And you're de-evolving. And, yeah, we don't want to be doing that. We want to be gaining some wisdom from somewhere in our lives. Well, yeah, he's an



opportunity to practice wisdom and your philosophy and ask some questions you never asked before that. Maybe you did. Know you needed to ask, but now they are necessary because you can discover some stuff about yourself that you didn't know, was possible.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:10

Just look at me and Stacy, I'm doing a podcast writing a book, you've written a book. And these are things that my 37-year-old self before the stroke, had no intention ever of getting completed, started. There wasn't even a conversation in my mind. Because what I was doing was, I was living in fear, and I was afraid of being myself and expressing myself at the risk of somebody judging me and then me not knowing how to deal with judgment.

Stacie Broek 1:00:43

Yeah, absolutely. I can only agree.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:47

And stroke kind of gives you that opportunity to go. I don't give a shit what people think anymore.

Stacie Broek 1:00:58

Yeah. For sure I sometimes I struggle when I was writing my Instagram title "Writer" I'm like, am I a writer? Can I say that? Then you fake it until you make it right?

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:16

You have to identify as a writer to write if you don't identify as that you can't sit down and write now. At some stage, it's going to feel foreign and weird and new. It's like new shoes, you put them on, and it's like a bit strange. But then later, they become part of your foot. And you don't notice them?

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:35

That's how the identity molds it molds from being the person who you labeled yourself as before, you labeled yourself as a mum as an intrapreneur as a wife, as a sister. And now you're just adding another new label to your bow of beautiful things that you are and do.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:53

And why not be a writer, and get it out of your head? If you're thinking about

being a writer, and you're listening to this, get it out of your head that a writer has to be published by a big publishing house or have a big deal or whatever, will have sold certain amount of books.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:09

Absolutely not. A writer is somebody simply who writes things. And that's it. If you identify as a writer. And if somebody asks you what kind of a writer you are, you can elaborate then you don't have to elaborate until that point in time. And if they ask you what have you written you can say I've written my memoir that'll do.

Stacie Broek 1:02:27

Yeah, exactly. For sure I fully agree.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:33

That could be one of the most important things you've written, you know, your memoir.

Stacie Broek 1:02:37

Yeah. Absolutely. Now I have to add the title motivational speaker. So that's my next goal.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:50

Beautiful. I love that that's a beautiful way to move from previous self, new self, new identity, transforming identity and into this other space, you know, public speaker, because it does come with the book is necessary to promote the book, it is necessary to appear on podcasts to do all these things.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:16

Because that's how people will relate to you and then receive your book and understand why it's written and get to be able to, you know, relate to the words in those pages. They can't do it, if you write it, put it on the bookshelf, and never release it and never tell anyone about it.

## **Raising Awareness**

Stacie Broek 1:03:36

Absolutely. It's scary right?, it's so scary. I just had a video interview with Philips healthcare. And that was one of the most scary, I think I would even be scared if I could get my words out properly. They came to my house, they had a camera crew

and whatever. And it was all for the world stroke day, which is happening at the end of this month. And it was really difficult for me to get my words out. But it's so I could tell my story, to raise awareness and all these things, but it was very scary.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:20

Yeah, absolutely. It's the first time and every first time is a bit weird, but then it gets easier and easier. And I remember also having been involved in some campaigns here for the Australian Stroke Foundation. And again, they turned up with camera crews to my house and all this stuff. And me and my wife were at home going what the hell's going on? There was 40 people in our house, it's a little house, doesn't fit for the people. But they were there. And they filmed for seven hours to get 90 seconds.

Stacie Broek 1:04:55

It was intimidating.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:58

Yeah, so much equipment, hundreds of 1000s of dollars of equipment. And this guy, Bill. It was never the guy that did that stuff. I don't do that stuff. I didn't get on TV and raise awareness about stroke or anything. I don't do that stuff. It was scary and fun. So much fun and the feedback was great.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:25

Because, as you know, the people who don't get strike or who are around you that know you had a stroke, but they don't really understand. Of course, they want to see the video, once you tell them, you've done it. And that helps raise Stroke Awareness directly to the family members who you want to protect. And that's how you do it in this unique way.

Stacie Broek 1:05:47

And the ball starts rolling absolutely.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:52

Yeah. Well done. Stacie. I really appreciate you reaching out. Thank you so much for reaching out and being on the podcast. If people wanted to find out a little bit more about you, where would they go?

Stacie Broek 1:06:08

So staciebroek.com is where my hub, so I have everything there. You can also visit me on Instagram, or LinkedIn. Stacie Broek as well. Not Stacie Pants, Stacie Broek. Yeah, and if you want to watch the video that we just talked about, you can watch it on the world stroke organization or Philips website. But that you have to wait until October 29. Or you can also see it on my website.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:50

Brilliant. We're going to definitely share all your links to people, they can go to [recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes](https://recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes), find your podcast episode, I think it's going to be 220. And they can find the links in the show notes and then they can connect with you there. Thank you so much for being on the podcast. I really appreciate it.

Stacie Broek 1:07:11

Thank you. That's really nice. Thank you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:14

Thanks for joining us on today's episode to learn more about my guests including their links to social media and other pages and to download a full transcript of the entire interview please go to [recoveryafterstroke.com/slash/episodes](https://recoveryafterstroke.com/slash/episodes). If you'd like to support this podcast, the best way to do it is to leave a five-star review and a few words about what the show means to you on iTunes, and Spotify.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:39

If you're watching on YouTube comment below the video will like the episode and to get notifications of future episodes. Subscribe to the show and hit the notifications Bell sharing the show with family and friends on social media will make it possible for people who may need this type of content to find it easier.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:56

And that may make a massive difference to someone that is on the road to recovery after their own experience with stroke. Thanks again for being here and listening. I really appreciate you I appreciate the comments and the support See you on the next episode.

Intro 1:08:09

Importantly, we present many podcast designed to give you an insight and understanding into the experiences of other individuals opinions and treatment protocols discussed during any podcast are the individual's own experience and we do not necessarily share the same opinion nor do we recommend any

treatment protocol discussed.

Intro 1:08:26

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Intro 1:08:49

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Intro 1:09:04

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Intro 1:09:28

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